The Legacy of Ocean Home Farm

By Barb Swanson

The Ocean Home Farm site with a close up of the two home sites. Photo credit: Nancy Bates

Ocean Home Farm is situated just north of Gearhart, Oregon, along the Clatsop Plains. The original 320 acres, a part of the Alva Condit claim and originally signed by Ulysses S. Grant, was purchased by William Tagg, my great grandfather, back in 1901. His purchase included a 3-story farmhouse built in 1889. This farmhouse where was my grandmother, Verna Bates, grew up and lived all her life.

After their marriage in 1890, Sara and William traveled to Clatsop Plains on the train, by way of Astoria, but the span across Young's Bay was not completed until 1891, and my

grandmother remembers her mom telling of the boat trip across the Bay, "…holding my skirt up out of the water, and an umbrella over my head."

I grew up in the house next door, which was originally a retirement home for William and his wife Sara. When my grandmother married Grenville Bates, she raised her family in the three story farmhouse and William and Sara retired next door. My father acquired the house after marrying my mother in 1953. They lived in Junction City, Oregon for about a year and then came back home to raise my three brothers and I on the Ocean Home Farm property.

The original Ocean Home Farm site sits along Highway 101. Photo credit: Nancy Bates

My mother has fond memories of living in this house. "Ed and I lived in that house for many years, and our family of four flourished there," she says. "It snuggled down in the pine trees and was much larger than it looked. I loved the honeysuckle that bloomed in June and always had a bouquet in the house."

In the early days, William and Sara operated the farm as a dairy and established a flock of sheep. The farm supplied milk, butter and lamb to the residents of Gearhart and Seaside. Orchards of apples, plums and pears flourished on the property along with gooseberries and wild blackberries.

In 1905, William and Sara also operated a guest house business out of their farmhouse and guest cottages. The businesses flourished for years.

A Given Name

William originally named the farm "The Downs," after the rolling dune-like hills of his native English land. The neighbor kids promptly painted their hillside, "The Ups." In 1916, William renamed the farm "Ocean Home Farm."

William's daughter Verna, married my grandfather, Edward Gren Bates on the porch of the farmhouse. William gave the farmhouse to them. Verna's husband Gren and her sister Elvia's husband Billy King, took over the farm after William retired. In 1918, Billy became interested in some newly irrigated land in Boardman, Oregon and so gave up his partnership at Ocean Home Farm. Verna and Gren remained and ran the house and the farm. My father, Ed Bates, and his sisters Patty and Barbara were born and raised there. My father ran the farm in later years.

Sara Tagg, wife of William Tagg, my great grandmother, buried at the Clatsop Pioneer cemetery. Photo courtesy: Clatsop County Historical Society

Portland Ties

In 1934, Gren moved to Portland and became the owner and operator of the Elco Dairy. He then sold it in 1943 and it became known as the Alpenrose Dairy, which is still in operation today. Verna stayed at Ocean Home Farm and operated the dairy, guest house business, a catering service and an antique shop, which continued years after I was born. I remember helping my grandmother run her antique shop and serve luncheons to women's groups. Her meringue desserts were a popular request. My love for cooking started there, in my grandmother's busy kitchen.

Portland families stayed at the farm in the era of the "Daddy Train," young Navy couples during World War II, vacationing families, clubs, women's groups, antique hunters and even famous people such as James Beard and Claudette Colbert.

James Beard and Verna enjoyed sharing recipes and favorite dishes. James Beard grew up vacationing in Gearhart with his family, and so deeply loved the area.

My grandmother remembers her and her sisters Lystra and Elvia, having treks to the beach, bathing in the icy ocean water, building bonfires, riding horses and picnicking. They roamed the many acres of property in search of wildflowers and Indian relics. They played in the meadow grass and climbed up the apple trees.

William Tagg, husband to Sara Tagg, pioneer farmer along Clatsop plains, also buried at the Clatsop Pioneer cemetery. Photo courtesy: Clatsop County Historical Society

My brothers and I grew up on this property and took many treks to the beach for picnics and swimming. We followed the trail which is now called DelRay Beach Road.

The Ocean Home Farmhouse as it looks today. Photo credit: Nancy Bates

There are several homes on the property now, but the Ocean Home Farm sign still stands close to Highway 101. Parcels of land were sold off over the years as the Oregon property taxes grew. One of my brothers owns a piece of the remaining land up on the hill where the “Daddy Train” used to pass by. My parents have a special plot and garden there. Sara and William Tagg are buried in the famous Clatsop Plains cemetery that sits behind the Clatsop Plains Pioneer church. My grandmother’s farmhouse still stands. When you drive by on the way to Gearhart, notice the beauty of the past, shining on that old three-story home full of memories.

For more information on the history of the Clatsop Plains area go to the Clatsop County Historical Society and the Heritage House in Astoria, Oregon or email cchs@cumtux.com.

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